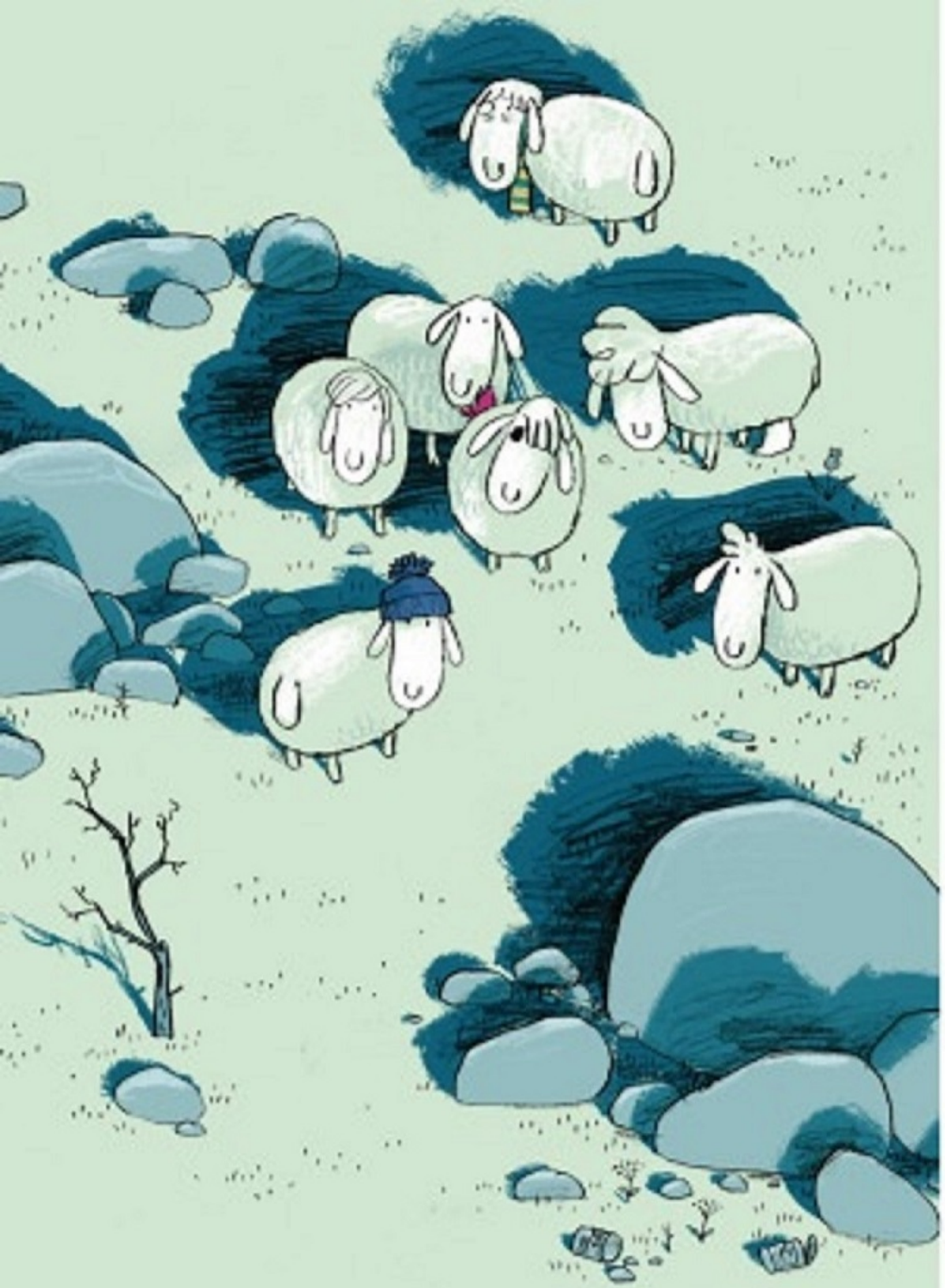


CHAPTER 1



The whole field is lit up, as if by a gigantic floodlight. Every rock, every thistle and every nibbled blade of grass can be clearly seen.

All the sheep are awake and staring open-mouthed at the night sky. A new star is up there, shining as bright as dawn. It can't be a good sign. Someone should check it out with the shepherds.

"The shepherds have gone!" comes a distant cry, from the sheep with the snuffly nose. The others

your nose. By the way, it's not just any old kid. The birth has been predicted for ages and everyone's been longing for the great moment, but the due date kept on being postponed. Then tonight at last it happened."

"What does the baby look like?"

While the sheep and the goat go on with their chat behind the tree, the flock is in uproar. Where's the sheep with the snuffly nose? Nobody's seen it for ages. They all sigh together.

"We're off to a great start," says the last sheep. "One lost already. Probably kidnapped by the UFO. At least none of us will catch that cold now."

"Atchoo!"

They hear a sneeze, then the familiar nasal voice. "Fear nod!"

They all turn round. The sheep with the snuffly nose is standing in full starlight, proclaiming: "I bring you good—"



But it gets no further, as accusations pour in from all sides. "You can't just come and go as you please. We were out of our minds with worry. You have to tell us if you're going somewhere. Especially since UFOs are constantly taking off and landing here."

"We've missed everything," the sheep groan. "How was it?"

"Terrible. Absolutely terrible!" The camels roll their eyes. "No wonder the kid's father had nightmares and secretly slipped away with his family. A ghastly brass band and inferior red wine—warm, as well." The camels shake their heavy heads. "People just lost it. They were all desperate to see the child. It was so packed that nobody could move. Whoever runs the local shop should have opened a second checkout counter."

"But the baby, the baby," the sheep persist. "Did you see it? Is it really that beautiful?"

The camels look at the sheep with slightly watery eyes. "We weren't stupid enough to wait in that queue. Everyone was only allowed a quick look in the manger anyway. Probably no one actually saw the boy with their own eyes."

"What? Boy?" The sheep are thunderstruck. "The baby isn't a girl? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," the camels yawn. "Nobody makes that kind of fuss when a girl is born. Besides, the kid is supposed to save the world later. Girls are far too meek and mild for that."

"Hmm." The sheep have their own ideas on the topic. But they'd rather not get involved in discussion about it now. They have one more question.

A very important question.

